

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Approved For Release 2005/12/14 : CIA-RDP91-00901R000600200015-7

WASHINGTON

SECRET AGENTS FEAR EXPOSURE UNDER FOIA, OFFICIAL SAYS

BY MIKE SHANAHAN

Significant numbers of secret agents have stopped providing intelligence to the CIA because they fear exposure under requirements of the federal Freedom of Information Act, the deputy director of the agency said Wednesday.

Urging changes in the law, John N. McMahon said agents who once provided intelligence information, including some in the Soviet Union, "won't touch us any more."

"Foreign agents, some very important, have either refused to accept, or have terminated a relationship on the grounds that in their minds...the CIA is no longer able to guarantee that they can be protected," McMahon said.

He provided no specific estimate of how many U.S. agents may have quit or refused to be recruited, except to say there have been "numerous such cases" where U.S. sources have refused to cooperate without saying why.

"There are many more instances where sources who have discontinued relationships or reduced their information flow have done so because of their fear of disclosure," McMahon said.

In addition, he said, some foreign governments refuse to pass on intelligence information to the CIA because they fear a legal requirement which might force public disclosure.

McMahon testified before a House Intelligence subcommittee which is considering legislation which would allow the CIA to exempt files about how it gathers intelligence from the information law.

That means that so-called operational files -- as opposed to actual intelligence information -- would not be accessible to the public under the Freedom of Information law unless a federal judge ruled it had been improperly exempted.

A similar measure was approved in the Senate last November.

Under the current statute, McMahon said the CIA is overburdened with requests for information. Each request from journalists, historians, or other interested persons must be answered in detail, and denials must be explained.

McMahon said foreign agents, knowing operational files might be inadvertently disclosed, have grown wary of recruitment.

"No one can quantify how much information vital to the national security of the United States has been or will be lost as a result," he said.

McMahon said if operational files are exempted, the result would be that persons seeking information would get action on their requests in about six months instead of the current two or two and one half years.

Critics of the proposed legislation have said intelligence abuses like those exposed in the 1950s and 1960s, could be covered up if all intelligence operations are exempt from the Freedom of Information law.